BRITAIN'S SECRET WAR IN ANTARCTICA

While some
high-ranking Nazis
would have known
about the haven
created in the ice in
Neuschwabenland,
after Hitler's death
it was Grand
Admiral Dönitz
who held the trump
card with his
knowledge of
U-boat movements.

Part 2 of 3

by James Robert © 2005

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Britain's Influential Captures

ith British forces controlling northern Germany and the ports that went with their sector at the end of World War II, there was a strong likelihood of their capturing most of the Nazi hierarchy. They were also ideally placed because Russia was more interested in Berlin, and the vast US forces were stationed mainly in southern Germany where they had been sent to investigate the supposed "Redoubt". Even so, four years before the end of the war, Britain had managed to apprehend the Deputy Führer of the Third Reich, Rudolph Hess, and he was arguably the most knowledgeable of all the Nazis at that juncture.

Rudolph Hess landed in Scotland on 10 May 1941 and asked to meet the Duke of Hamilton. His plans for peace talks were quickly rebutted, and so began his 46-year incarceration. Hess's imprisonment is one of the most widely discussed mysteries of the war. Some claim he was imprisoned because of the damage any revelations he possessed would inflict on the British monarchy. Others claim that Britain's refusal of his peace proposal led to the nation's huge losses territorially, materially, financially and emotionally; because of his silencing, the British people never heard the peace terms or learned how beneficial they may have proved. However, as Christof Friedrich claims, some believe that "Hess was entrusted with the all-important Antarctic file"; but whether this was a paper file or a mental note, one thing is for certain: Hess, Deputy Führer, would have known everything about the Nazis' Antarctic intentions.

Though Hess was dismissed by both Hitler and the British Government as "insane", 10 surely Hess's insanity would have restricted his ability in his numerous roles in the Nazi Party and Government. Yet Hess was chief of the Auslandsorganisation, Commissar for Foreign Policy, Commissar for All University Matters and University Policy, Commissar for All Technological Matters and Organisation, and also head of the Office for Racial Policy. Hess, in layman's terms, had his "finger in every pie".

Rudolph Hess was also an active member of the Thule Society, and his interest in Antarctica would have been on both personal and professional levels. Hess, a keen aviator, used his position in both the Nazi Party and the Thule Society to meet Richard Byrd when he lectured the personnel who were heading for the Antarctic with the Deutsche Antarktische Expedition (German Antarctic Expedition) in 1938, and through his channels Hess would have known everything that had been discovered in Neuschwabenland. Byrd, a living legend throughout the world for being the first man to fly over both the north and south poles, was possibly the most well-informed polar explorer ever, and he divulged his vast knowledge and details of his exploits to the Nazis

Byrd's advice in his lecture and ultimately the Nazis' successful expedition to claim Neuschwabenland may have given the Nazis conviction enough to establish a viable Antarctic base. Hess's flight and eventual capture a few years after the Deutsche Antarktische Expedition meant that plans would have been underway. His enviable position as Deputy Führer and his close affiliation with the Thule Society which sponsored the expedition meant, as Canadian journalist Pierre van Paasen claimed shortly after Hess's flight, that "[t]here was no major military plan and secret of the Third Reich of which he was unaware". 12

Of his 46 years in prison, Hess spent the first four totally under British jurisdiction.

The secrets he gave away in those four years, though dismissed officially as "lunacy" by the British Government and at the Nuremberg Trials, were taken seriously in some quarters—particularly after Britain had caught more of Germany's most powerful Nazis at the end of the war. Unfortunately, with Hess being imprisoned until his suspicious "suicide" in 1987 at the age of ninety-seven, ¹³ all records about him are locked firmly away under the UK Official Secrets Act and will be for the foreseeable future. Only circumstantial evidence can be used to gauge how much or how little Hess knew about the Antarctic haven.

Heinrich Himmler, Reichsführer of the SS, was captured on 23 May 1945 by the British. Though he managed to kill himself with a cyanide capsule and thus evade interrogation, his entourage did not have that luxury. Himmler was denounced

as a traitor by Hitler for trying to make peace with the US and Britain. But as Himmler had nothing to bargain with and his heinous past meant certain execution, could he still have offered the British information that they desired in the hope of escape or, at worst, a chance to evade the hangman?

Unfortunately for him, with no chance of a reprieve and with Dönitz being apprehended the same day, Himmler became an irrelevance; and with his "disgust" at being treated as just a lowly soldier, he announced who he was before inducing his

death. Britain nevertheless more than likely gained all the knowledge that Himmler possessed by interrogating his entourage exhaustively. Whatever knowledge Himmler had wished to share, was shared—and without the British having to keep one the vilest men in Europe in their custody.

Himmler, labelled a "half crank, half schoolmaster" by Albert Speer, had managed to rise from being a lowly poultry farmer to becoming the most feared, reviled man in Europe because of his system of terror, which made mass murder an industry, and because

of his faithful paramilitary SS who ensured "loyalty" and "obedience" to the Nazi State.

The SS Ahnenerbe missions which Himmler authorised in pursuit of the "ancestral Aryan legacy" to such remote places as Tibet, Egypt and Iraq, and even as close by as the Channel Islands, brought in an inestimable amount of research. And though the 1938 Deutsche Antarktische Expedition was firmly under Hermann Göring's control, Himmler was indeed more than interested in the findings of the expedition and the possibility of discovering an entrance to the fabled Hollow Earth—so much so that he surely would have demanded to have been informed for the sake of furthering the Aryan legacy myth.

Even so, how much Himmler knew that was not already known by British Intelligence at the end of the war is debatable, though invaluable to the Allies and Britain in particular were the results of the numerous SS Ahnenerbe missions. Even though Dr Ernst Schäfer, who led the Tibet Expedition, claimed that "Himmler had some very strange ideas" and also that "[t]hey all dabbled in the occult", 16 this

made no difference to the validity or invalidity of any research or evidence collected.

Himmler evaded the hangman's noose by a cyanide capsule, and Göring also used a cyanide capsule on the eve of his execution. Could the pills have been supplied by Britain's SOE in return for information? Hess, Himmler and Göring were all able to commit "suicide" whilst in custody—two of them being firmly in British custody at the time. All three "suicides" have an aura of mystery surrounding them, especially since the three men would have had some knowledge to share about Antarctica.

Hermann Göring, though captured by US forces, still had a fair deal of knowledge about the German Antarctic expeditions of 1938–39 and 1939–40, for it was he who commemorated the first expedition with a medal and bragged to the world about

the "German success".17

Göring was the Nazi Party's number two for so long, but he managed to cheat death and justice in the most mysterious of circumstances. Born into affluence as a son of a colonial officer, Göring became one of Germany's World War I air aces and ended up highly decorated. He joined the Nazi Party in 1923 and took part in the Putsch, where he established himself in Hitler's favour but also received a groin injury. As a result of this injury, Göring became addicted to morphine—an addiction that would have profound consequences.

Göring's marriage to a wealthy and influential woman helped him consolidate his position amongst the elite. His connections to the upper classes assisted the Nazi Party far more beneficially than any parades. In 1932, Göring was elected Speaker of the Reichstag but, despite his popularity, he was making enemies because of his self-obsession, ambition and greed. He became one of Germany's richest men, virtually all his wealth plundered from victims of the Nazis. In 1936, he reached the pinnacle of his career in the Nazi Party when he became

Hitler's heir apparent. Yet his popularity had not yet peaked: he would have to wait until the early German success in deploying the Blitzkrieg against Poland for that short-lived honour. But, his addiction was starting to plague his judgement and standing amongst the elite.

The early German victories saw Göring rise in Hitler's estimation, but Hitler's fickle temperament was due to change. When Göring's Luftwaffe failed to win the Battle of Britain despite having superior numbers, Göring fell out of favour. He then found solace only in his morphine and his vast, plundered wealth.

By 1943, Göring was no longer part of the top Nazi leadership; he was heavily addicted, a virtual recluse and drastically out of favour. Any knowledge about Nazi survival plans that he would have been privy to would have been disputable, but it is highly likely that he would have been able to divulge to US Intelligence enough about Antarctica, learned from his time amongst the elite, to have compelled the United States to consider the possibility of a Nazi base on Antarctica and to take

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action. Moreover, the Americans would have heard rumours about what the British had discovered.

The first Antarctic summer after the completion of the Nuremberg Trials saw Operation *Highjump* launched; but it is quite possible that the Americans missed the boat because the then most well informed Nazi, Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz, had already been interrogated extensively by the British. Could a secret deal have been struck between Dönitz and Britain? When we look at the facts, it is more than conceivable that a deal was indeed struck.

Grand Admiral Dönitz: Key to the Antarctic Haven

I believe I fought for a just cause and I refused to run away from my responsibilities when the Nazis, shortly after their final collapse, offered to convoy me aboard a submarine to safe refuge [emphasis added].

Major Vidkun Quisling,
 Nuremberg, 1945

Grand Admiral Dönitz had taken over the leadership of Nazi Germany, and every U-boat, ship, boat and port still held by the Germans

after Hitler's death was under his command. He would have been the perfect successor to orchestrate a tactical escape—an escape that would ensure that the German deaths and the research undertaken were not in vain and, in short, that would enable the seeds of a Fourth Reich to disperse.

Many Nazis chose to stay and meet certain death, in spite of the Kriegsmarine having the largest submarine fleet in the Atlantic and the navy's willingness to continue the fight from Norway; it was not that they had nowhere to flee, but many yearned for martyrdom and knew that a greater scheme was being implemented: the emergence of a Fourth Reich.

Quisling wanted to die as a Nazi and showed no remorse, just as those who were hung at Nuremberg had. Their assuredness came from a warped view that they would be deemed martyrs. Hitler, Himmler, Goebbels and numerous other highranking Nazis committed suicide—and taking one's own life has been the norm throughout history when the battle is lost and only public humiliation and execution are certain.

Those who committed suicide in Germany's final collapse and those who stood at Nuremberg did so knowing that if they

had fled they would have compromised any secret bases or havens as well as the expatriot communities that flourished in South America and throughout the world. The chances of a Fourth Reich manifesting with so many high-profile Nazis in hiding were minimal, and the Germans, meticulous and diligent as ever, knew that fact. Sacrifices had to be made.

Grand Admiral Karl Dönitz, Second Führer of Nazi Germany, and his government had been legitimised by various countries around the world when Hitler's death and Dönitz's promotion were known. However, his promotion also meant that he was ideally placed to assist the Nazis in their plans to escape Europe.

Tried as a war criminal alongside the rest of the Nazi hierarchy, Dönitz was given a reprieve from the death sentence and instead was sentenced to serve 10 years in Spandau Prison in Berlin. Throughout his trial, Dönitz claimed that he had only fought in a legal war and that he was ignorant of any Nazi "atrocities" committed. He also claimed to have no knowledge of the "Final Solution". Albert Speer loathed Nazism and was comprehensively remorseful of his part in the Third Reich, yet

he received 20 years! Dönitz, on the other hand, wanted his navy to be totally behind the Nazi movement, so much so that he issued a directive on 14 February 1944, ordering his naval officers not just to accept but to embrace Nazism:

"The whole officer corps must be so indoctrinated that it feels itself co-responsible for the Nationalist Socialist State in its entirety. The officer is the exponent of the State. The idle chatter that the officer is non-political is sheer nonsense [emphasis added]." 18

Dönitz's light prison sentence is strange in view of his unbridled passion for Nazism, but his directive also contravened virtually every rule amongst the German armed forces. The army's leadership and, to an extent, the Luftwaffe steered clear of politics and focused primarily on the war, but Dönitz asserted that to be "non- political" is "sheer nonsense". His plea for loyalty could explain the unaccounted-for U-boats and why so many were seen in the months and years after the war had ended—especially in light of what Albert Speer noted on 10 December 1947 in Spandau Prison:

"For all his personal integrity and dependability on the human plane, *Dönitz has in no way revised his view of Hitler*. To this day, *Hitler is still his commander-in-chief* [emphasis added]." ¹⁹

In Hitler's final political statement, he called for all Nazis "not to give up the struggle in any circumstances, but to carry it on wherever they may be against the enemies of the Fatherland". Hitler then named his successor after denouncing Göring and Himmler as traitors: "I appoint Grand Admiral Dönitz as President of the Reich and Supreme Commander of the Wehrmacht."²⁰

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Hitler had chosen his most loyal military officer and the one person whom he believed could restore the Reich's fortunes. As noted by eminent historian Chester Wilmot:

"The importance Hitler attached to the holding of these U-boats bases reflected the rising power of Dönitz, who was fast becoming the most influential of his counsellors." ²¹

Hitler favoured Dönitz and was so fascinated about the new U-boats' capabilities and the possibility of turning the tide in the Atlantic that "from the start of 1945 they were almost in daily consultation". With the new U-boats being able to stay submerged the entire trip from Europe to South America or Antarctica, the chances of a percentage of the Nazi war machine escaping were vastly improved, as was the ability to deal with the British and American navies.

At the Führer Naval Conference on 3 January 1945, Dönitz bragged about how the new U-boat fitted with the *Schnorchel* could "achieve success in waters where Germany was forced to cease operations more than three years ago". Dönitz's 1945 claim was nothing new: back in 1943, he had already claimed that the new U-boats would create "entirely new possibilities" 23

and his boasts meant that Hitler ordered the construction of Dönitz's U-boats as a top priority.

The faith that the Nazi hierarchy had in the new U-boats never diminished, even as Russian soldiers were streaming into Germany. On 6 March 1945, Goebbels spoke up about the sentiment shared amongst the Nazi elite:

"There is considerable hope for us here. Our U-boats must get to work hard; above all, it may be anticipated that as the new type gets into action, far greater results should be achieved than with our old U-boats."²⁴

Goebbels again noted in his war diary how pleased the Nazi hierarchy was:

"Clearly, the revival of our U-boat war has made a great impression on the war."

Goebbels's perceived "revival" was recorded on 28 March 1945, only a month before his death in supposed desperation!

Dönitz, as Hitler's most trusted envoy after Goebbels, was aware of Nazi plans for the East as well as the concentration camps. And though some historians suggest he should never have been tried as a war criminal, in the face of the raft of evidence to the contrary, the only aspect that should raise eyebrows about Dönitz's sentence at Nuremberg is its length. His light sentence was due to his assistance in supplying the Allies with information that was invaluable, especially when he had virtually all knowledge of the mysterious U-boats that were being spotted around the world after the war.

Britain, being the nation to apprehend Dönitz, was the main beneficiary of Dönitz's intelligence and, as his arrest on 23 May 1945 was the second time he had been incarcerated by Britain, the British interrogators would have known just which buttons to switch to get the answers they wanted.

In 1918, in the closing days of World War I, Dönitz had been taken prisoner by the British Navy. He was sent to a prisoner-of-war camp and then transferred to the Manchester Royal Lunatic Asylum. After extensive psychological tests, he was certified "insane" and was left to be "treated" for a year.

In spite of Goebbels's comment that Dönitz was "a very cool

and realistic calculator", ²⁵ the time Dönitz spent in the lunatic asylum would have left mental scars that would have surfaced if he'd again been threatened with incarceration. That fear and his loyalty to the Third Reich meant he had no choice but to stall on the notion of surrender when, on 1 May 1945, he first heard about his succession after Hitler's death. Dönitz then announced to the Wehrmacht:

"Against the British and Americans I shall continue the struggle so far and so long as they hinder me in carrying out the fight against Bolshevism." ²⁶

With Dönitz still in command of a large navy and enough Wehrmacht to cause further problems for the Allies, his announcement was a threat that the Western Allies in particular took very seriously; it made them realise that peace was still far from certain and "Unconditional Surrender" might need reassessing.

The London *Times*, the day after Dönitz's announcement, advised caution:

"Dönitz may gather a force sufficiently large to cause trouble. The fighting spirit of the navy is probably still high.

There is a formidable number of U-boats based on Norway, where the enemy also has 200,000 land forces and some hundreds of aeroplanes. It is thus likely that Dönitz contemplates making his stand there rather than in the overrun Reich or in the southern redoubt now threatened from the north and south. He may delay somewhat, but cannot alter, the decision."²⁷

In light of Dönitz's pledge to continue the fight and the vast force still under his command, and considering Allied fears, could "peace" have been struck—a peace that had guarantees

for all sides? Dönitz could have asked for Germany to be rebuilt and not humiliated like at Versailles, for the Western Allies to fight the spread of Bolshevism, and for leniency if not clemency from the victors, including a whitewash of his personal wartime history, in exchange for a total surrender and for passing on extremely sensitive intelligence. Only a week after Dönitz had declared that the war would continue whilst Bolshevism persisted, he ordered the surrender of all German forces.

All the facts indicate that Dönitz's history has been suppressed, and against all reason Dönitz is still not perceived by mainstream historians as having been a major player in Nazi Germany. Clemency was shown with such a short prison sentence, the communist threat had been realised by the Western Allies, and West Germany rose out of the ashes of May 1945 to become the powerhouse of Europe, with many of the major companies that bankrolled the Nazi Party forming huge conglomerates.

Other than formally calling for a German surrender and bringing the war in Europe to an end, Dönitz carried on as President of Germany for a further three weeks and was only arrested on 23 May 1945 by British forces.

Dönitz, twice imprisoned by the British and a reluctant admirer of the British naval tradition (which did nothing to dampen his hatred for Britain), was the one person who knew the exact state of play concerning the Nazi U-boats, including the new and formidable Type XXI U-boats. Dönitz was also

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the one person who would have known where the Neuschwabenland base was and what had been transported there and elsewhere. And with information so vital not just to national security but world security, Dönitz could have chosen to divulge as little or as much as he wished; no matter how minimal or sketchy his intelligence, its value was priceless.

Dönitz was an impressive character and in the early stages of the war had impressed Hitler with his loyalty and vision. Dönitz duly received his reward on 31 January 1943 when he was promoted to the position of Supreme Commander of the Navy. In one of his inaugural speeches to a select officer elite, Dönitz claimed that "the German submarine fleet is proud of having built for the Führer, in another part of the world, a Shangri-La land, an impregnable fortress". ²⁸ This was an impressive statement and one that inspired allegiance in his

officers and pride in Hitler and the Kriegsmarine. Dönitz's statement spread around the Kriegsmarine with gusto, for all who heard it believed in the possibility.

Whilst researching Third Reich mysteries, I encountered an East German source who had served in the Kriegsmarine and has first-hand accounts about Neuschwabenland. He claimed:

"Neuschwabenland, after Europe, was in ruins and Norway, completely in German hands, became the only viable base of operations. When it was decided that for the German nation surrender was best, those who could, left, and took their

"Antarctica was a secret but rumours persisted, and only for the most dedicated was it a haven. Most of those with any intimate knowledge of Neuschwabenland did not see the end of the war, and of those who did, the majority were executed, committed suicide or were sent to the Russian gulags... Only those captured by the British forces fared better, but after interrogation were forbidden to men-

chances in the U-boat convoys.

tion their wartime exploits again. The threat of having damaging wartime links brought up kept the Germans silent and helped the Allies suppress the truth."²⁹

The German naval officer who gave the account was captured by the USSR and sent to the Siberia for 15 years; when he returned, it was to a communist East Germany. In contrast, Dönitz served only 10 years and lived in a free West Germany. This has caused the officer bitterness, especially as mainstream historians dare not even write about a Nazi Antarctic haven or Dönitz's passion for National Socialism.

When Dönitz spoke of a "Shangri-La land" in 1943, was he telling the truth? With Kerguelen being used as a German U-boat base and Neuschwabenland still in German plans, Dönitz knew that his statement would impress Hitler. Unfortunately though, with most of the documents—including speech notes, memoirs and diaries—relating to Nazi plans for Neuschwabenland destroyed, disappeared or archived firmly away, any suggestion of Antarctica being a Nazi haven was laughed off by nervous governments. It meant that to raise the subject was to open oneself up to ridicule.

However, Dönitz's speeches leave enough clues to cause one

to suspect that a whole chapter from World War II has been purposely suppressed. In 1944, Dönitz announced:

"The German Navy will have to accomplish a great task in the future. The German Navy knows all hiding places in the oceans and therefore it will be very easy to bring the Führer to a safe place, should the necessity arise, and in which he will have the opportunity to work out his final plans." ³⁰

The Kriegsmarine was much travelled, loyal to its cause and daring in its exploits. German U-boats were frequent visitors to the East Coast of America and they travelled under the Arctic ice and even up the River Mersey into the Mersey Estuary in England. But their most interesting exploit was discovering an underwater trench that went straight through Antarctica by way of a connection of subterranean lakes, caves, crevasses and ancient ice tunnels.

The Allies took Dönitz's statement seriously, especially after Hitler's mysterious suicide; they were aware that Antarctica could have been the "safe place" that Dönitz had spoken of. The British were already onto it, but the Americans were only compelled into action after Dönitz made a statement in 1946, supposedly during his trial at Nuremberg, boasting of an "invulnerable fortress, a paradise-like oasis in the middle of eternal ice".³¹

Britain, having already investigated the "invulnerable fortress", assisted the United

States by covertly supplying maps of Antarctica, whilst overtly, along with Chile, Argentina and other claimant countries, expressing grievances about the intended Operation *Highjump*. Britain's assistance in supplying these maps—similar to the Norwegian maps utilised by the 1938 Deutsche Antarktische Expedition—did not paint the full picture.

Dönitz's information supplied to the British and the likely destruction undertaken by British forces of the Neuschwabenland base meant that

Queen Maud Land (Neuschwabenland) was not reconnoitred meticulously by the Americans. There is no answer to explain this omission, though many have speculated. More than likely it was because the area had been explored so profoundly earlier in the century, but one can't help but wonder whether it was because Britain had been there first, leaving nothing for the Americans to find. However, Operation *Highjump* still supposedly recovered evidence of other bases—though, similarly to British expeditions on Antarctica, *Highjump*'s true findings have also been suppressed?

Dönitz had a unique knowledge of Antarctica, but it was his knowledge of German U-boat ports in Norway and U-boats stationed there, as well as the nexus between Norway and Antarctica, that shed further light on the forgotten Antarctic front. But, whilst the importance of Norway to Dönitz, Hitler and the Kriegsmarine was well known, some of the real reasons for the initial invasion of Norway are less so and add even more of a mystery to the history of World War II and the Antarctic front.

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Britain's Secret War in Antarctica

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Editor's Note

The author advises that Operation *Tabalan*, referred to in part one of his article, should read *Tabarin*, and apologises for this error. Operation *Tabarin* was named after a Parisian nightclub.

About the Author:

James Robert is a civil servant with an agency of the UK Ministry of Defence, as well as a World War II historian and writer. He has travelled extensively throughout North Africa and Europe to investigate mysteries of Britain's secret wars.

With a family from a military background and with German sources giving many so-called "myths" credence, he has set a personal mission to delve deeper into the strange, suppressed, little-known and anomalous activities that were conducted before, during and after the war against Germany. "Britain's Secret War in Antarctica" has been excerpted from his forthcoming book that will document some of his investigations.

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Endnotes

- 9. Christof, Friedrich, Germany's Antarctic Claim: Secret Nazi Polar Expeditions, Samisdat Publishers, Toronto, 1979
- **10.** Hess's insanity is just one aspect of the Hess mystery, and the numerous references to his insanity are too numerous to catalogue. However, it did not prevent him from standing for trial at Nuremberg.
- 11. Picknett, L., Prior, S. and Prince, C., *Double Standards*, Little Brown, 2001.
- **12.** Van Paasen, Pierre, *Chicago Times*, 1941.
- 13. Britain, France, the USSR and USA took turns to guard war criminals including Hess in Spandau Prison. Hess's suspicious death occurred, so we are led to believe, because the Russians were going to release him when their turn next came around. See Picknett et al., *Double Standards*, for more detail.
- 14. Nuremberg Trials (1945–1946).
- 15. ibid.

- **16.** ibid.
- **17.** This was reported in the German press on 10 April 1939.
- **18.** Officer Naval Directive, 14 February 1944.
- **19.** Speer, A., *Spandau: The Secret Diaries*, MacMillan, New York, 1976, p. 81.
- **20.** Hitler's final political testament, 29 April 1945.
- **21.** Wilmot, C., *The Struggle For Europe*, Wordsworth Editions Ltd, Hertfordshire, 1997, p. 617.
- **22.** ibid.
- 23. Führer Naval Conference, 8 July 1943.
- **24.** Report sent by Goebbels to Dönitz, 6 March 1945.
- 25. Wilmot, op. cit.
- **26.** Directive to the Wehrmacht, 1 May 1945, reported in *The Times*, London, 2 May 1945.
- **27.** *The Times* (London), 2 May 1945.
- **28.** *The National Police Gazette*, January 1977.
- **29.** The former Kriegsmarine officer was from Dresden and was interviewed in December 2003. I investigated claims that Hitler and Eva Braun's child had been born there in 1942.
- 30. Officer Naval Directive, 1944.
- 31. Nuremberg Trials, 1946.